Automotive News

JANUARY 6, 1992

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NEWSPAPER

latenews

Olds offers buy-back deal

Oldsmobile will take the unusual step of offering to buy back new Achieva models from West Coast customers if they decide they'd rather buy a different car, even from a competitor, according to *Advertising Age*, a sister publication to *Automotive News*.

Under the program, a customer has up to 30 days or 1,500 miles to return the Achieva and buy another vehicle to qualify for his or her money back.

The offer will debut in West Coast TV ads beginning Jan. 13, *Advertising Age* said. The ads specifically mention competitors Toyota Camry and Honda Accord.

Monte Carlo confirmed

Chevrolet General Manager Jim Perkins confirmed the division's plans to reintroduce the Monte Carlo nameplate on a sleek, front-wheel-drive coupe in the next couple of years.

Automotive News reported in September 1990 that Chevrolet planned to reintroduce the Monte Carlo name — which debuted in the 1970 model year and left the lineup in the 1988 model year — on a Lumina-based coupe in 1993 or 1994.

Perkins left the timing in doubt, but the car is likely to appear in the 1994 model year when the Lumina is scheduled to be redesigned.

— *Phil Frame*

see LATE NEWS, 2

Air bags spawn few lawsuits

6 million cars, 60 cases; Big 3 may fight every one

HELEN KAHN
Senior Correspondent

Air bags are passing the American legal litmus test.

People aren't suing over them much, and they aren't complaining about them much.

Furthermore, the record for air bags is so good that car company lawyers may decide to defend all such suits instead of buying off marginal claims as they often do.

The Big 3 have some 6 million cars with air bags on the road, and they are defendants in only about 60 lawsuits. In contrast, more than 2,000 suits were filed against Ford Motor Co. over allegations that some automatic transmissions slipped from park into reverse. The complaints involved 20 million vehicles equipped with the Ford transmission.

Of more than 200,000 alleged safety defects called in to the safety hotline at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration from 1985 to last Sept. 30, just 370 were about air bags. Since 1987, recalls have been announced to fix 10,543 air bags; in the same period, recalls have covered more than 4.7 million seat belts.

"If other car components were as reliable as air bags have proved to be, the companies' product-liability case load would be reduced almost tenfold," said Clarence Ditlow, director of the Center for Auto Safety.

"For example," said Ditlow, "if a tie rod fails in an air bagged car, and the air bag works, there is no injury, and no trial lawyer is going to waste time suing."

The NHTSA hotline counts complaints; it

see AIR BAGS, 29

Among the stars unveiled at Los Angeles' auto show is Ford's redesigned Probe.

Nuts and bolts displace show glitz

Showroom sheet metal dominates L.A. exhibits

KRISTINE STIVEN BREESE
Staff Reporter

LOS ANGELES — If the 1992 Greater Los Angeles Auto Show is any indication, automakers this year are taking a nuts-and-bolts approach to selling cars rather than wowing consumers and the media.

Production cars destined for the showrooms far outnumbered fancy concept vehicles at the California show, which opened to the public Saturday. Displays were low on glitz and heavy on sheet metal.

Detroit gets ready ➤ 3

The unofficial theme during last week's press days might well have been: 1992 sales can't be any worse. Last's year's Los Angeles show, after all, was clouded by the looming Persian Gulf war. And the market failed to shine all year.

"All I can say about 1991 is, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, thank God it's over,' " declared Jim Perkins, general manager of Chevrolet. "Looking forward is a lot more fun than looking back these days."

In its display, Chevrolet offered a look forward to the 1994 model year with a close copy of the next Geo Prizm.

Los Angeles also marked the North American or world debut for other new products, ranging from the niche to the mainstream.

see LA, 31

Big 3 prepare methanol cars for showrooms

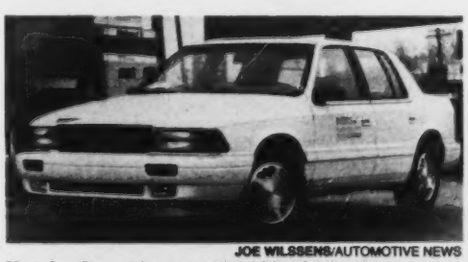
JACK KEEBLER
Staff Reporter

Despite technical and marketing problems, the Big 3 automakers will forge ahead with plans to sell more than 8,500 methanol-powered sedans starting this year.

The Big 3's plans surpass the original goal of the California Energy Commission, which called for 5,600 flexible-fuel vehicles in public and private fleets by the end of 1992.

General Motors, Ford Motor Co. and Chrysler Corp. say they are more than willing to sell flexible-fuel vehicles — if they can find environmentally sensitive customers.

Methanol is a clean-burning liquid fuel made from natural gas. A flexible-fuel vehicle can run on any combination of up to 85 percent methanol and 15 percent gasoline, which is called M85. The EPA says vehicles running on the fuel produce about 50 percent less smog-forming emissions than gasoline.



JOE WILSSENS/AUTOMOTIVE NEWS

Chrysler Corp. plans to sell 2,100 vehicles this year that run on either a mixture of methanol and gasoline or 100 percent gasoline.

Consumers show reluctance to flex-fuel ➤ 30

Last week, Chrysler announced plans to sell 2,100 Dodge Spirit/Plymouth Acclaim models that will run on either pure gasoline or M85. Chrysler will begin the program with an initial delivery of 100 cars for government fleets in Washington and California. In July, a second wave will be offered to fleets and for retail sale to individual customers without any price premium over standard gasoline-powered sedans.

"Last May, we introduced our methanol concentra-

see FUELS, 30

U.S. execs likely to reap concessions at summit

RICHARD JOHNSON
Staff Reporter

TOKYO — Several trade concessions are expected to be on the table this week when the chairmen of the Big 3 sit down with the heads of Japan's five biggest automakers at a historic summit meeting in Tokyo.

The eight, who together account for more than half of world auto production, are scheduled to meet Thursday afternoon at Tokyo's Hotel Okura in a bid to trim Japan's intractable auto-trade surplus with the United States. The Japanese makers are Toyota, Nissan, Honda, Mazda and Mitsubishi.

The meeting is unprecedented.

Although it is unclear what the actual summit will accomplish, Japan's government and its carmakers have been scrambling in recent weeks to ensure that President Bush and his entourage do not return to the United States empty-handed.

Bush, on the Australian leg of a 12-day Pacific swing that also takes him to Singapore, South Korea and Japan, warned last week that the United States expected "fair play" from Japan and more access to Japan's market.

"I want to see more jobs created in the United States . . . by concessions made, or by positions taken, in Japan," Bush said.

Although Bush is not ex-

see SUMMIT, 27

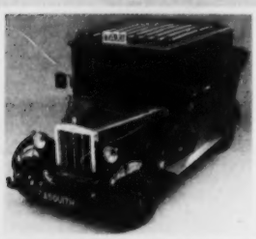
Automotive News

SATURN ON THE WAGON
Compact station wagon aimed at California buyers. PAGE 4

LIABILITY LAW TARGETED
Congress to consider measures for national code. PAGE 6

100-MPH LABORATORY
GM to use Ultralite features in regular car lines. PAGE 8

OLDIES BUT GOODIES



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Sales, Canada by make
Sales, dealer by make
Sales, 10 day by make
Inventory, as of January 1
Production, weekly by model

JANUARY 27
Sales, 10 day by make
Sales, truck by gvw
Production, weekly by model

66th year—No. 5427
Advertising Production Dept. (313) 446-6063
Circulation Department
In Michigan..... (313) 446-0480
Outside Michigan.....1-800-678-9595
Classified Ad Department..... (313) 446-6065
Display Ad Department..... (313) 446-6030
Editorial & Business Offices . (313) 446-6000
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HANS G. LEHMANN/HIDDEN IMAGE

Renault prepares new flagship

This spy photo shows an undisguised prototype of the forthcoming replacement for the Renault 25. The front-wheel-drive sedan measures about 186 inches in length. Engines will include a choice of 2.0-liter four cylinders with two, three or four valves per cylinder, and two 3.0-liter V-6s. The official unveiling is slated for the Geneva auto show in March.

latenews

CONTINUED *from* PAGE 1

Hyundai recalls subcompacts

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif. — Hyundai Motor Co. is recalling about 895,000 Hyundai Excel and Mitsubishi Precis cars to fix a problem that could cause an engine fire.

The recall covers 1986 to 1989 model Excels, and 1987 to 1989 Precis, which are built by Hyundai.

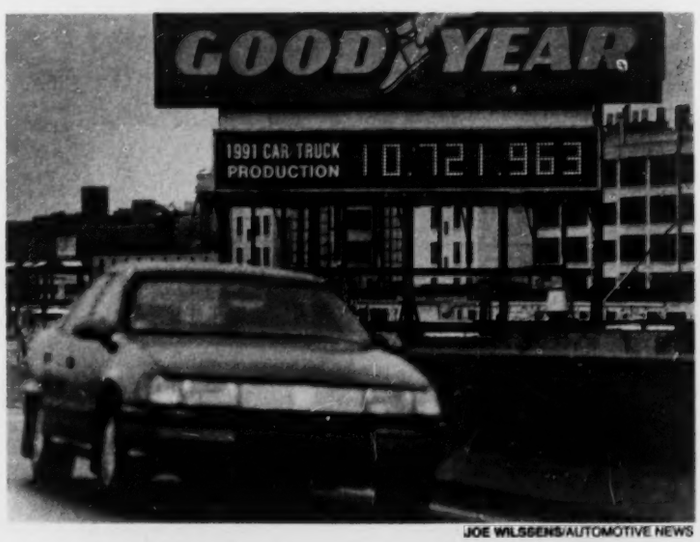
Hyundai said a defective reed valve subassembly could cause a malfunction in the secondary air supply system which would allow hot exhaust gasses to melt the plastic portion of the air filter and make an engine fire possible.

Buick Sceptre at Detroit show

DETROIT — Buick will display a rear-wheel-drive, mid-sized concept sedan called Sceptre at the North American International Auto Show.

The Sceptre, to be unveiled at a news conference tomorrow, is described as a personal luxury sedan. It is a five-passenger car powered by a 3.5-liter supercharged V-6 engine and an electronically controlled five-speed automatic transmission.

The car rides on a 111.8-inch wheelbase and develops 250 horsepower and 280 pounds-feet of torque. Sources at Buick indicated that the Sceptre may be an indication of the styling direction of the next-generation Buick Regal, which is scheduled to debut in the 1995 model year. However, the Regal is a front-wheel-drive car. — *Phil Frame*



JOE WILSSENS/AUTOMOTIVE NEWS

A sign at the intersection of I-75 and I-94 in Detroit gives the *Automotive News*-supplied estimate for 1991 calendar year production of light vehicles in the United States and Canada. The figure is the lowest since 1982.

'91 output down 9%; '92 starts slowly

ANNE E. WRIGHT
Chief Statistician

List of plant closings ➤ 31

U.S. and Canadian car and truck production for the 1991 calendar year is estimated at 10,721,963, down 8.9 percent from 1990.

U.S. car production was shared by manufacturers as follows: General Motors, 44.0 percent; Ford Motor Co., 21.6 percent; Chrysler Corp., 9.4 percent; Honda of America Manufacturing Inc., 8.4 percent; New United Motor Manufacturing Inc., 3.6 percent; Toyota Motor Manufacturing U.S.A. Inc., 3.5 percent; Mazda Motor Manufacturing (USA) Corp., 3.1 percent; Diamond-Star Motors Corp., 2.8 percent; Nissan Motor Manufacturing Corp. U.S.A., 2.5 percent; and Subaru-Isuzu Automotive Inc., 1.1 percent.

Production for the 1992 calendar year began last Thursday on the same down note that ended 1991, with fewer vehicles produced and more plants idled.

Last week's estimated car and truck production in the United States and Canada was 54,108 for two days of production, at a daily build rate of 27,054. The year-ago week's assembly was 113,770 for three days of production at a daily build rate of 37,923. On a daily rate basis, the first week of production in 1992 was off 28.7 percent.

The Big 3 extended the holiday vacation at 29 plants. Ford tops the downtime list with eight trucks plants and seven car plants idled, GM shut five truck and four car plants and Chrysler closed three car and two truck facilities.

In the year-ago week, 23 plants were given an extended holiday vacation.

correction

The Powertrain Division of General Motors has an engineering center in Warren, Mich., that is responsible for four-, six- and eight-cylinder engines. A Dec. 23 issue chart inaccurately listed the facility as a manufacturing plant.

briefly

Honda buyer ties up phones

An angry car owner launched a telephone blitzkrieg on **American Honda's** toll-free information line in Torrance, Calif., and the phone company had to block all calls from a Massachusetts area code to get the lines working again. American Honda has sued Daniel Gregory in U.S. District Court in Boston, according to The Associated Press. The company said Gregory complained about the tires on his 1990 Honda CRX, but a dealer inspected them and found them normal. A Honda consumer affairs manager said Gregory then abused customer service employees by phone. A week later, Honda's toll-free, "Better Business Bureau Information Line" got "more than 100 harassing calls" in one day, Honda said. The next day, Gregory reportedly began calling a toll-free number used by dealers to reach American Honda's finance company. The company asked him to stop and sought help from police. The company said Gregory then tied up a fax number for four days.

GM WINS AT ROSE BOWL— UAW workers didn't let the fact that **General Motors** plans to close its Van Nuys, Calif., plant rain on their parade at the Rose Bowl. The UAW withdrew as co-sponsor of the GM Tournament of Roses Parade float several weeks ago when GM announced the plant closing. But so many auto workers showed up to work on the float that some were assigned to work on other floats. The GM float, "Looking to the Future," was honored as the parade's best.

BELATED BIRTHDAY — Complete with color slides, black and white photos and four pages of text, a Camaro 25th-birthday package arrived last week, courtesy of **Chevrolet** public relations. Just one problem: The Camaro went on sale Sept. 29, 1966, as a 1967 model, so the car's 25th birthday was more than three months ago. Another omission, but perhaps understandable: The material doesn't mention the fact that the Camaro was a delayed response to the **Ford** Mustang, which debuted April 17, 1964.

TIME FLIES — To encourage the development of clean-running electric cars, Germany will exempt them from vehicle taxes for five years. Most of the major automakers are working on such cars, but by the time they have something to sell, little of the five years will be left.

A GREEN BENZ, PLEASE — Naturalis, a trendy department store in Palm Beach, Fla., claims to sell "the world's finest recycled, recyclable and environmentally safe products." Among the merchandise on display is a 1992 **Mercedes-Benz** S-class sedan. Mercedes-Benz says the car is made of practically 100 percent recyclable materials. It features a chlorofluorocarbon-free air conditioning system, water-based paint, an asbestos-free brake system and plastic parts marked for easy sorting and recycling. But has anybody looked at its fuel-economy numbers?

Mercedes-Benz S-class: sensibly chic for the Palm Beach set.

Fleet buyers sticking with the Big 3

CHARLES M. THOMAS
Staff Reporter

Even though Japanese manufacturers have made small dents in American corporate fleet sales, fleet managers say they will purchase virtually all of their vehicles from domestic automakers this year.

General Motors will account for 40.6 percent of all new fleet sales, Ford Motor Co. will account for 33.9 percent and Chrysler Corp. for 23.4 percent, while imports will account for a scant 2.1 percent of fleet sales, according to a survey by the National Association of Fleet Administrators.

"Fleet managers have long been great supporters of domestic manufacturers," said Gordon West, association president. "The Big 3 counts on fleet managers to purchase at least 25 percent of their new model year vehicles. In tough economic times such as these, and with global competition a reality, it is difficult to ignore the importance of steady fleet sales."

For years the fleet market was virtually ignored by Japanese manufacturers because they never had enough volume to sell into it, particularly in the early 1980s, when Japanese makers operated under a voluntary restraint agreement.

That changed when Japanese makers began producing vehicles in the United States. Now they can meet most of fleet managers' criteria, including on-time delivery, acquisition pricing and a large enough dealer base to deliver almost anywhere.

But they still have to overcome a "buy American" preference from fleet mangers.

Fleet sales will continue to be strong through 1992 as 99 percent of the 562 survey respondents continue to provide vehicles for their sales and service personnel rather than changing to employee-owned vehicles.

Fifteen percent of the respondents said they will increase the number of vehicles in their fleets during the year. Each respondent manages an average of 1,194 vehicles.

Fleet managers will order safer cars in 1992. The survey revealed that two out of three U.S. companies will order vehicles with air bags. And three out of five companies will include vehicles with anti-lock brakes in their fleet.

The federal government is prodding fleet managers to purchase safer cars. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is expected to announce regulations this month which may require employers to adopt safety belt policies and provide safety education to everyone who drives company cars on business.

Twenty-nine percent of corporate respondents buy only vehicles with air bags, according to the survey. An additional 29 percent order air bags when available; 6 percent permit the driver to select the option.

In addition, 11 percent of public utility fleets and 20 percent of law enforcement and government fleets order air bags.

According to the survey, 14 percent of corporate fleet managers only order vehicles with ABS, only 4 percent of public utility fleets mandate ABS, and 11 percent of law enforcement and government fleet managers only order vehicles with ABS.

Twenty-nine percent of both corporate and public utility fleets order ABS as an option when available. However, 45 percent of law enforcement and government fleets order ABS as an option when available.

Initial cost was cited by fleet managers as the most important factor when selecting vehicles, followed by job suitability and the country where the vehicle was built.

Cellular telephones are gaining in popularity. Fifty-one percent of all survey respondents provide cellular phones in their fleet vehicles.

More than 25 percent of survey respondents indicated they plan to acquire alternative-fuel vehicles for their fleets. Fifty-eight percent said compressed natural gas vehicles are their top choice.

Saturn unveils '93 wagon

LINDSAY CHAPPELL
and KRISTINE STIVEN BREESE
Staff Reporters

Saturn will expand its product line later this year with a compact station wagon targeted primarily at California buyers.

The Spring Hill, Tenn., automaker also has revealed the possibility that it may introduce a minivan to the fledgling line.

Donald Hudler, Saturn vice president of sales, service and marketing, said California-dominated consumer studies confirmed a strong demand for both a wagon and a van, but the company decided to develop the wagon first.

"This is what we could do next with product expansion without over-taxing this relatively small company," Hudler said at the Los Angeles auto show. "It doesn't mean no van; it only means no van in 1993."

Hudler said the General Motors unit expects the wagon to comprise one-tenth of its 1993 model year sales, meaning as many as 24,000 units.

The company said the new model was specifically designed for California sales, although it will be marketed nationwide.

As Saturn originally predicted, California has become the line's biggest market, representing 12 percent of total sales. Import brands hold almost half of California car sales, and Saturn has staked much of its reputation on reclaiming domestic sales there.

He cited the new wagon's "sporty" appearance as representing a California-influenced design, although the car was developed in Saturn's Troy, Mich., technical center.

1993 Saturn station wagon is based on sedan, has the same 1.9-liter engine.

He said that consumer surveys focused on California taste preferences in developing the car, which begins production in August. About 75 percent of the development clinics and focus groups were conducted in California.

The car will contain a rear seat as in some large wagons. Hudler hinted that the format would make Saturn a low-priced alternative to Honda Motor Co.'s Accord wagon.

The wagon prototype has the same dimensions as the existing Saturn sedan, but could end up being slightly taller. Like the sedan, the wagon will offer two trim packages.

Saving GM plant is biggest issue in Mich., Texas towns

PHIL FRAME
Staff Reporter

The most popular bumper sticker in Arlington, Texas, these days reads: "Keep GM — The Heartbeat of Arlington."

Mayor Richard Greene passed out the stickers last week on one of his now-frequent visits to the General Motors assembly plant.

The Arlington plant is competing with a plant near Ypsilanti, Mich., over which one will stay open after GM completes its retrenchment in the United States and Canada.

The Arlington and Ypsilanti plants both make large rear-wheel-drive cars, which have been selling poorly, leaving the plants operating at barely half capacity.

GM said one of the plants will close as part of a restructuring that will require the closing of 10 assembly plants, four powertrain plants and 11 components plants by 1995. The closings will cost 60,000 blue-collar and 20,000 white-collar jobs.

While GM's announcement left virtually every plant city wondering about its fate, concern is strongest in Arlington and Ypsilanti because one of the two plants definitely will be closed.

UAW Local 276 in Arlington responded immediately by voting to allow four-day work weeks of 10 hours per day, if necessary. That schedule enables GM to boost the capacity of a plant without having to pay workers overtime.

Members of Local 1776 in Ypsilanti say they won't offer concessions until GM asks. But they will talk about how much better their plant is and how much cheaper it is to build a car in Ypsilanti.

In Arlington last week, the city council hired a consultant to update a several-year-old report on the economic impact that the GM plant has on the city and the state.

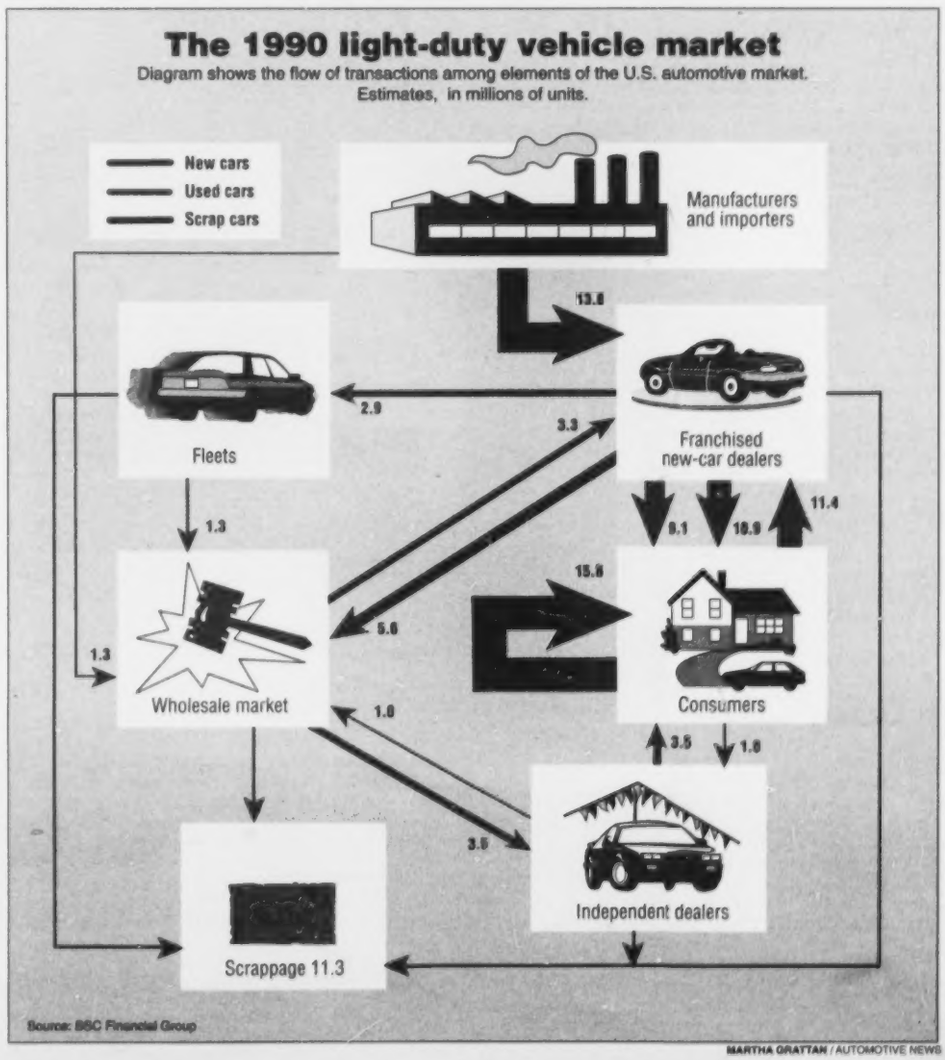
The council also agreed in principle to grant GM a tax abatement should the company decide to expand the plant if it consolidates production of the Chevrolet Caprice, Buick Roadmaster, Cadillac Brougham and Oldsmobile Custom Cruiser wagon in Arlington.

"Those are all the things we can do. We would do more if we could," said Mayor Greene, who is a co-owner of Vandergriff Chevrolet-Buick Co. in Arlington. "We're not trying to sponsor a bidding war, but it's very difficult for us not to respond in a way that would ensure the plant's future."

The Arlington plant is the city's largest private employer and largest taxpayer — supplying $3.7 million a year in city, school and county taxes.

Ypsilanti-area officials are scheduled to meet today to consider a package of incentives similar to Arlington's.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



Mid-Dec. sales match '90

Truck gain offsets decline for cars

JIM HENRY
Staff Reporter

NEW YORK — Light-truck sales improved slightly in mid-December and almost offset a decline in car sales.

Sales of new vehicles totaled 270,175, which was only 2,131 units or 0.8 percent below last year. Car sales fell 2.3 percent to 172,447, while light-truck sales, including minivans, rose 2.0 percent to 97,728.

There were nine selling days in mid-December this year and last.

Ford Motor Co., American Honda Motor Co. Inc., and Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. Inc. reported higher 10-day sales this year.

Ford and Chevrolet are fighting it out again for bragging rights for the nation's best-selling, full-sized pickup, this time for the calendar year. Ford claimed its pickups outsold Chevrolet's for the 1991 model year, and Chevrolet later disputed that claim.

Ford Division reported mid-December sales of all light trucks jumped 17.6 percent to 30,091. Chevrolet said its light-truck sales fell 13.9 percent to 21,990 for the 10 days.

"It is close, but the final report isn't due until Monday (today)" said Chevrolet spokesman J. David Hudgens. Through Dec. 10, Ford's F series led Chevrolet's C/K line by 12,247.

Ford and Chevrolet both declined to predict full-year pickup sales. Each company disputes how the other counts its sales, so the final tally might not end the argument.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we had another 'Miracle in Dearborn,' but we sell real cars to real people," Hudgens said, sarcastically referring to Ford's statistics.

For the 10 days, Ford Motor Co. said it sold 62,077 cars and light trucks — a 5.5 percent improvement, even though car sales were off 3.8 percent.

General Motors sales slipped 4.9 percent to 91,447. Buick continued to shine, with its sales up 9.5 percent. Cadillac, which had been on a roll since the introduction of 1992 models, dropped 15.5 percent. GMC Trucks climbed 8.8 percent.

Chrysler Corp. sales were off 7.2 percent to 31,590, despite a 1.4 percent improvement in light trucks and minivans. *Automotive News* estimates Chrysler's sales.

Two of the three biggest Japanese companies posted substantially higher mid-month sales.

American Honda shot up 32.3 percent. Honda sales were up 32.7 percent, and the Acura Division improved 30.9 percent.

Acura offered dealer incentives of $2,500 on 1991 Legend sedans and $3,000 on Legend coupes. Through Dec. 31, Honda dealers received $500 on all 1991 models except the CRX.

Toyota Motor Sales also turned in a strong mid-month performance, with sales 17.0 percent above the year-ago period.

Lexus sales rocketed 64.8 percent, helped by the division's two new coupes and its new ES300 sedan.

10-DAY CAR AND TRUCK SALES, BY MAKE

	Dec. 11-20, 1991	Dec. 11-20, 1990
ALFA ROMEO (imp. car)*	51	77
Acura (imp. car)	3,783	2,828
Domestic car	9,473	6,384
Imported car	4,724	4,315
Honda	14,197	10,699
AMERICAN HONDA	17,980	13,527
ASTON MARTIN (imp. car)*	2	2
BMW (imp. car)*	1,286	1,627
Domestic car*	2,384	3,360
Imported car*	0	50
Domestic truck*	82	97
Chrysler Division*	2,466	3,507
Domestic car*	6,712	7,340
Imported car*	705	879
Domestic truck*	9,241	8,596
Imported truck*	157	222
Dodge*	16,815	17,036
Domestic car*	699	1,086
Imported car*	330	147
Eagle*	1,028	1,233
Domestic truck*	3,570	3,697
Jeep*	3,570	3,697
Domestic car*	3,905	4,492
Imported car*	401	482
Domestic truck*	3,407	3,610
Plymouth*	7,712	8,584
Domestic car*	13,699	16,278
Imported car*	1,435	1,558
Domestic truck*	16,299	16,000
Imported truck*	157	222
CHRYSLER CORP.*	31,590	34,058
Imported car*	122	151
Imported truck*	43	58
DAIHATSU*	165	209
FERRARI (imp. car)*	24	24
Domestic car	21,008	20,930
Imported car	1,142	621
Domestic truck	30,091	25,582
Ford Division	52,241	47,133
Domestic car	3,270	5,612
Lincoln	3,270	5,612
Domestic car	5,467	5,019
Imported car	1,099	1,082
Mercury	6,566	6,101
Domestic car	29,745	31,561
Imported car	2,241	1,703
Domestic truck	30,091	25,582
FORD MOTOR CO.	62,077	58,848
Domestic car	11,380	10,390
Buick	11,380	10,390
Domestic car	4,497	5,319
Cadillac	4,497	5,319
Domestic car	20,936	24,066
Imported car	2,343	1,830
Domestic truck	21,918	25,481
Imported truck	72	60
Chevrolet	45,269	51,437
GMC	8,056	7,402
Domestic car	7,923	8,877
Domestic truck	988	574
Oldsmobile	8,911	9,451
Domestic car	9,421	10,879
Imported car	534	202
Domestic truck	664	662
Pontiac	10,619	11,743
Domestic car	2,715	447
Saturn	2,715	447
Domestic car	56,872	59,978
Imported car	2,877	2,032
Domestic truck	31,626	34,119
Imported truck	72	60
GENERAL MOTORS	91,447	96,189
HYUNDAI*†	2,483	3,146
Imported car*	280	242
Domestic truck	939	1,215
Imported truck*	1,927	2,611
ISUZU*	3,146	4,067
JAGUAR (imp. car)*	184	483
LAMBORGHINI (imp. car)*	4	4
LOTUS (imp. car)*	8	8
MASERATI (imp. car)*	6	6
Domestic car	983	1,148
Imported car*	3,118	3,381
Domestic truck	228	297
Imported truck*	2,588	2,832
MAZDA*	6,916	7,658
MERCEDES-BENZ (imp. car)*	1,468	2,008
Domestic car	2,233	1,092
Imported car*	2,478	1,584
Imported truck*	703	1,177
MITSUBISHI*	5,412	3,853
Infiniti	812	833
Domestic car	2,778	2,762
Imported car*	5,403	6,386
Domestic truck	2,179	2,076
Imported truck*	3,386	3,245
Nissan*	13,746	14,469
NISSAN MOTOR CORP.	14,358	15,302
PEUGEOT (imp. car)*	26	89
PORSCHE (imp. car)*	83	190
RANGE ROVER (imp. truck)*	114	116
ROLLS/BENTLEY (imp. car)*	7	30
SAAB (imp. car)*	529	485
STERLING (imp. car)*	0	80
Domestic car	522	1,657
Imported car*	1,002	1,709
SUBARU*	1,524	3,366
Imported car	137	129
Imported truck	394	334
SUZUKI†	530	463
Lexus (imp. car)	3,184	1,884
Domestic car	7,604	6,270
Imported car	7,719	7,778
Domestic truck	155	0
Imported truck	6,773	5,733
Toyota	22,251	19,781
TOYOTA MOTOR SALES	25,355	21,665
Audi (imp. car)*	277	384
Imported car*	1,812	2,607
Imported truck*	55	126
Volkswagen*	1,867	2,733
VWoA*	2,144	3,117
VOLVO*†	1,342	1,548
YUGO (imp. car)*	85	151
Domestic car	123,909	127,130
Imported car	46,536	49,372
TOTAL CAR	172,447	176,502
Domestic truck	81,517	79,289
Imported truck	16,211	18,514
TOTAL TRUCK	97,728	95,803
TOTAL CAR & TRK.	270,175	272,306

*Estimated †Breakdown of North American built and imported car sales not available.
There were 9 selling days in the period this year and 9 last year.

GM-Holden's has launched a new Series II of its Statesman/Caprice model in Australia with refinements such as anti-lock brakes and an optional automatic ride-leveling system.

GM revamps big Australian sedans

SYDNEY, Australia — General Motors-Holden's Automotive Ltd., GM's Australian unit, has launched a new series of its Statesman/Caprice model in a bid to erode Ford's dominance of the country's big-sedan segment.

Ford's long-wheelbase sedans traditionally have outsold Holden's by 3-to-1 in the segment, but GM says its new Series II cars are mounting a serious challenge to that lead.

GM said it expects to sell about 2,280 units in the upscale segment this year, compared with expected sales of 3,850 for Ford's Fairlane/LTD series.

Priced from the equivalent of $31,300 to $46,800, the new Holden's cars are refinements of the existing range. Mechanical improvements include anti-lock brakes as standard equipment on Caprice and optional on Statesman; independent rear suspension; speed-sensitive steering; and an optional automatic ride-leveling system.

With an eye on the fleet market, Holden's has introduced an optional 3.8-liter V-6 engine for the Statesman, which previously had been sold only with a 5.0-liter V-8.

— Pedr Davis

Ultralite features tagged for GM production cars

WILLIAM R. DIEM
Assistant Managing Editor

DETROIT — General Motors expects to see several features of its 100 mpg Ultralite concept car in production on regular car lines.

Some of the ideas are so good, "I'm a little sorry to see them out here" exposed to competitors, said the car's chief designer, Jim Bieck.

Features aimed at production include the 1.5-liter two-stroke engine, low rolling resistance tires, and the material that symbolizes the Ultralite, carbon fiber.

At its introduction to reporters Friday, the Ultralite was cast as a technological laboratory, not a potential production car. Much of the weight savings comes from using carbon fiber for the body, and GM expects to translate some lessons into other projects, like the electric car under development for the mid-1990s that is based on the company's Impact concept car.

Don Runkle, GM's advanced engineering vice president, said carbon fiber will be designed into vehicles in areas where incredible stiffness is required.

But carbon fiber will come slowly because of its cost. The raw material is $40 a pound, and the Ultralite uses 420 pounds.

Other features of the car could appear quickly.

"The two-stroke engine will be in the product plan of the future," said Runkle. The fuel-injected one in the Ultralite is 1.5 liters, has three cylinders, and should yield a top speed of over 100 mph.

The 18-inch Goodyear tires, or similar ones, will also show up on streets, likely on the electric car derived from the Impact.

The lightweight seats in the Ultralite could show up next in GM's APV family because they could be easily removed and moved. He indicated that the Impact-based electric car might use such seats, which stretch see-through webbing over composite carbon fiber frames that are strong enough to anchor the seat-belt mechanism.

GM is casting its Ultralite concept car as a technological laboratory.

Most of the Ultralite's instruments are reflected in a mirror set far forward under the sloping windshield in an arrangement GM calls virtual image display, which could show up in production.

Other items that could end up in production cars include the sideways muffler used as an underbody aero wing, and air outlets formed in the visor over the speedometer, where it is close to the driver but out of the way.

Stempel opens World Congress

DETROIT — General Motors Chairman Robert Stempel, just back from a trip to Japan with President Bush, will kick off the 1992 Automotive News World Congress with a dinner speech Sunday, Jan. 12, at the Westin Hotel in Detroit.

Stempel's speech, "2020 Vision: What the Next 30 Years Hold for the Auto Industry," will be followed by the second keynoter, Stanley Gault, chairman and chief executive officer of Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. Gault's topic is: "The Pursuit of Certainties in An Uncertain World."

Stempel's speech will be his first major North American public appearance since he announced a dramatic series of plant closings and other cost cuts on Dec. 18.

A pair of speakers will highlight each of the three evenings of the World Congress. Over three days, 25 prominent speakers will address automotive topics at the World Congress at the Westin.

Stempel

Tickets are still available for the Tuesday night gala dinner, featuring legendary automotive entrepreneur Roger Penske, president of Penske Corp., and Gerald Hirshberg, vice president of Nissan Design International Inc.

The Monday night speakers are Allan Gilmour, president of the Ford Automotive Group at Ford Motor Co., and Paolo Cantarella, president and chief executive officer of Fiat Auto S.p.A.

For information, call Wendy Barydt at (313) 764-5592.

Air bag recalls

May 1987 — 283 units, 1986 and 1987 Mercedes-Benz 190, 260E, 300 and 560 models; electrical connection may disconnect, and bag may not deploy.

August 1987 — 230 units, 1987 Mercedes-Benz 300, 420 and 560 models; generator did not ignite at low temperatures.

February 1989 — 1,883 units, 1987 and 1988 Volvo 780 series; replace electronic control systems.

February 1990 — 857 units, Buick Reatta; reversed wires in impact sensor may delay deployment.

April 1990 — 2,543 units, 1990 Toyota Celica; incorrect machining of inflator unit.

April 1990 — 257 units, Chrysler Corp. models with gray interiors; machining problem with inflators made by Morton Thiokol.

October 1990 — 4,490 units, various TRW customers, to replace bags with cross-threaded parts that could fail.

Among the callbacks, Ford recalled 167,247 vehicles searching for 3,056 faulty bags; GM recalled 2,166 vehicles to find 1,224 units; Honda recalled 44 vehicles seeking 47 units; and Mazda recalled 2,708 vehicles to find three units. GM and Honda had kept better records. Some of the Hondas with faulty bags had not been distributed.

— Helen Kahn

AIR BAGS

6 million cars, only 60 lawsuits

continued from PAGE 1

doesn't try to judge them. It took calls of 225 alleged failures to deploy; 49 burn complaints; 35 reports of oversensitive deployment; 18 complaints of "violent" deployment and 43 other complaints. The Big 3 were named in 68 percent of the complaints about air bags.

Of the 225 non-deployment reports, 155 persons claimed injuries. On average, the injuries were minor: Two-thirds of victims sought no medical attention, and of three persons who spent a night at a hospital, two stays were deemed unnecessary.

Experience with air bags has already led to improvements and expertise. Companies are now warning drivers about slouching or leaning forward and about unbelted occupants and out-of-position children.

Early complaints of burns from escaping gases have resulted in running engineering changes: General Motors and Chrysler Corp. redirected venting of hot nitrogen oxide away from occupants, and Chrysler added a tether to control the geometry of the unfolding bag.

A look at the eight lawsuits filed against Ford suggests some so-called nuisance suits — suits that are so vague as to be difficult and time-consuming to disprove but that might be closed with only a little money.

But although it may be cheaper and quicker to settle most of them than to find out what really happened, Ford may fight all the way to establish its own belief in the air bag's safety — especially in view of its record with 5,000 cars in a government fleet — say Ford legal sources.

One suit against Ford blames air bag failure for a fatality. Ford has not yet answered that case in court, but company lawyers believe the driver air bag deployed as designed in the accident, which involved massive front-end damage in a high-speed collision with a full-sized truck.

The other seven contain allegations of injury. They involve seven separate accidents in seven different 1990-model cars.

Chrysler so far has the most cases: 30 to 40. Chrysler made air bags standard in 16 car lines for the 1990 model year, giving it the highest percentage of cars with air bags on the road. The suits are bunched among models built before May 1990, when running engineering changes were made to vent hot gases and add the tether.

Ken Gluckman, a lawyer in charge of Chrysler litigation involving air bags, says the number of car rental units in its cases is disproportionately high, suggesting that some plaintiffs may be people who waived collision damage coverage and later had an accident. He said they may be suing to recover the cost of repairing their uninsured rental cars, which would include the cost of replacing air bag systems.

Gluckman said Chrysler is not playing that game. The company insists that its bags deployed properly, that the injuries were minor and short-lived and that it will defend the cases involving air bags.

GM has fewer than 10 lawsuits, almost all of them alleging failure to deploy. Only minor injuries have occurred, and GM insists the air bags worked properly in all the accidents. While GM lawyers did not offer specifics on any suits, they emphasized that air bags offer protection in frontal crashes only and are designed to supplement, not replace, seat belts.

At least two air bag cases involving imported cars have been settled out of court.

- A Pennsylvania out-of-court and private settlement involved an unexpected deployment of an air bag in a leased 1988 BMW because of an electrical short in an actuation circuit in the steering column.
- A Massachusetts out-of-court settlement for $6,000 involved a 1990 Acura Legend hitting a stopped car and underriding the bumper with no deployment of the air bag.

DAVID L. BURHANS / AUTOMOTIVE NEWS

Widow's suit seeks $21 million

HELEN KAHN
Senior Correspondent

The most serious case involving air bags filed against Ford Motor Co. is one by a New York widow who says an air bag failed to save her husband's life. She is seeking $21 million from Ford and TRW.

Ford disputes the charge and says that air bags aren't able to protect drivers in all crashes. In this case, the crash was so severe that the head of driver David H. Litman was pinned between the steering wheel and head rest. It took rescue workers a half hour to get him out.

The widow, Haviva Litman, also sued the drunk driver of the 1979 Chevrolet Suburban for an equal amount in punitive damages. The van hit the 1990 Continental on Aug. 17, 1990, and left it with massive front-end damage. The suit was filed in March 1991 in Nassau County Supreme Court.

The suit charges that although the air bag was made and sold as a safety device, it failed to operate properly and neither TRW, Ford's supplier, nor Ford, the assembler, warned of possible danger.

It seeks recompense because of the two companies' alleged negligence and because the air bag did not save David Litman. All aspects of design, material, testing, construction and assembly are addressed as faulty.

Ford's engineers inspected the Continental and found that it suffered massive front-end damage as a result of a severe high-speed collision with a larger, heavier vehicle and that the driver's air bag deployed as designed.

The Ford spokesman said no restraint system can protect all occupants in all collisions, especially in accidents as severe as this one.

Air bags proved OK in federal service

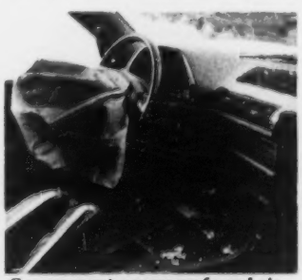
HELEN KAHN
Senior Correspondent

Two programs using air bags undertaken by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in 1983 and 1984 have been called "very positive" experiences.

One involved 5,300 Ford Tempos with driver-side air bags that were driven by government employees. The Defense Department used 300, and NHTSA and the federal fleet shared 5,000. The program provided Ford Motor Co. with a wealth of hands-on experience.

In the other government program, 539 police cars were retrofitted with air bags.

The National Center for Statistics and Analysis says the air bags "performed well in service, mitigating injuries." It reported that as of Jan. 1, 1987, (when the Tempos had racked up some 123 million miles and the retrofitted police cars had logged 52 million miles) "no known cases in which the air bags failed to deploy as designed and only one non-crash deployment."



Government programs found air bags "performed well in service."

That incident, which had no negative consequences, involved a police car retrofit in which the readiness indicator light on the instrument panel gave "adequate warning of a fault in the electrical system, but no action was taken."

In 100 crashes in which air bags deployed, there were either no or minor injuries. Six persons suffered moderate injuries; the most severe (at a velocity change of about 25 mph) produced a mild concussion. In all crashes in which the bags did not deploy, they were not supposed to — with one exception involving a Tempo which crashed into a heavy truck at a closing speed of about 95 mph.

The experts said: "This crash was so severe that the vehicle's electrical system was destroyed before the crash sensors could trigger the air bag. The driver was fatally injured and could not have been protected by the air bag."

A private fleet has had similar experience.

Government Employees Insurance Co. has operated an 800-car air-bagged fleet for its employees for five years. Ed Utley, company president, has reported three successful deployments and no failures to deploy.

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FUELS
Methanol cars debut this year

continued from PAGE 1

tion smart sensor, making possible the production of true flexible fuel vehicles that will be totally transparent to the owner," said Francois Castaing, Chrysler vehicle engineering vice president. "Now I'm proud to tell you we are putting our money where our mouth is and will, unlike some competitors, offer these environmentally friendly vehicles with no price premium."

Chevrolet announced in November that it could build up to 4,000 Lumina models that operate on the M85 fuel blend. Ford has said that later this year it plans to offer up to 2,500 Taurus sedans that operate on M85.

Like domestic car companies, import makers have been providing methanol-powered test vehicles to the California Air Resources Board and the EPA.

Mercedes-Benz of North America plans to deliver six flexible-fuel 300SE models to the California Energy Commission later this year and produce 9,000 for sale in California in 1994.

Mazda Motor Corp., Mitsubishi Motor Corp., Nissan North America Inc., Toyota Motor Corp., Volkswagen United States Inc. and Volvo Cars of North America have all unveiled small numbers of flexible-fuel models for federal and state government testing and demonstration fleets.

Ryuhei Narita, senior vice president of Nissan Research and Development, expressed concern about the ability of any carmaker to market flexible-fuel vehicles when he unveiled the company's experimental flexible-fuel NX 1600 coupe last March. Nissan plans to place 16 coupes with the California Energy Commission.

Narita said that although car buyers express concern for the environment, finding serious customers for flexible-fuel cars was "giving us nightmares."

Carmakers have expressed concern about the size of the market for vehicles that cost more than proven gasoline-powered models, burn a more expensive fuel and have a shorter range.

Car buyers must also balance the scarcity of M85 pumps in their buying decision. Although methanol is less expensive than gasoline, its lower calorie count yields fewer miles per gallon than gasoline. The EPA estimates that total energy costs for miles driven are comparable for gasoline and M85.

So despite California legislation, 1990 Clean Air Act provisions that require "clean-fuels" fleets, and even cash incentives of up to $2,000 per vehicle, makers are still worried that buyers may not seek out methanol-fueled cars. And carmakers are just starting to sort out what the true cost of the vehicles will be to consumers.

"There are already ethanol- and methanol-powered cars on the road, but Ford doesn't publish their true cost," said Anne Nazareth, a Ford governmental affairs associate.

"Most of the fleets out there are test fleets or demonstration fleets. They are money-losing propositions for us, leased or sold below cost, to help us gain some on-road experience," she said.

Chevrolet announced in early November that it would be the first automaker to offer an alternative-fuel vehicle to retail customers. Customers can now order flexible-fuel Lumina models for delivery beginning in April. The flexible-fuel Luminas are federally certified and will operate in California with an experimental permit from the California Air Resources Board.

Ford has announced plans to produce 2,500 1993 flexible-fuel Taurus sedans for delivery primarily to California starting in November 1992.

Carmakers are reluctant to discuss the additional cost of the more sophisticated control electronics, stainless steel fuel lines and tanks, and new lubricants required by the methanol fuels.

A year ago, Volkswagen displayed its methanol-powered Jetta at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. At that time Volkswagen officials said that in mass production, the Jetta with the flexible fuel system was expected to cost approximately $300 more than a comparable gasoline-powered Jetta.

Staff reporter Jim Henry in New York contributed to this report.

Ford finds buyers like flex-fuel for the other guy

JIM HENRY
Staff Reporter

NEW YORK — Despite mandates by California regulatory agencies and ambitious sales goals by the Big 3, flexible-fuel cars remain a marketing challenge.

Automakers are still uncertain how many car buyers who profess to be politically and socially correct will actually pay several thousand dollars extra for a less-polluting car with a limited range and a power source that might not be available everywhere.

Ford Motor Co. says it found consumer reluctance when it polled 2,500 people in a nationwide phone survey last fall.

"The answers vary considerably between, 'Should *somebody* buy one?' and, 'Would *you* buy one?' " said Anne Nazareth, a Ford governmental affairs associate. "The answer seems to be, 'Somebody should buy one, but not me.' "

Everyone is well-meaning about the environment, said Bill Cregan, North American alternate-fuel vehicles program manager for Ford.

And several Ford officials agreed that today's environmental awareness seems to be here to stay.

But people start falling off the bandwagon when you tell them what it may cost, Cregan said.

Ford uses the survey to support its position that the federal government will have to subsidize low-emissions or no-emissions cars, or nobody will buy them.

In the phone survey, "a majority" said they would make "some kind of sacrifice" to help the environment. Only about one-third said they would be willing to make "a large sacrifice," Cregan said.

Price, technical shortcomings and the perceived benefit affected willingness to pay, he said.

Ford created a hypothetical vehicle for the survey. The hypothetical vehicle outperformed any low-emissions vehicles on the road today, but people still were not willing to buy it, Cregan said.

For instance, few people said they would buy a car that reduced emissions 20 percent. They would rather car-pool or use more conventional methods, Cregan said.

If a car that reduced emissions 40 percent was available, about 10 percent of the respondents said they would buy it, even if it cost $500 to $600 extra.

But when people were told the fuel for the hypothetical vehicle might be available at only one out of 10 gas stations — which might be expected in a new industry — the number willing to buy dropped to about 2 percent of the total.

Industry lobbyists complain that emissions from new cars already have been reduced about 93 percent and that new federal standards will cut emissions only another percentage point or so.

Federal emissions standards for 1996-98 could add $1,100 to the cost of the average gasoline-powered vehicle, Ford said. And the added cost for California-standard cars could be twice that.

So Ford concludes from its survey that only a miniscule minority, certainly less than 2 percent of the population, would be willing to pay for low-emissions cars — much less electric vehicles, which are even more expensive than ethanol and methanol vehicles.

Volvo, Audi kick off new wave of rebates

ARLENA SAWYERS
Staff Reporter

Volvo Cars of North America last week added 1992 models to its incentive lineup and extended its previous program on 1991 models.

Audi of America is wooing its dealer body with cash incentives on vehicles purchased from port stock.

Through March 31, **Volvo** factory-to-dealer rebates on 1992 cars are: 240 series, $500 to $1,000; 740 series, $1,000 to $1,500; and 940 series, $1,500.

incentive WATCH

The dealer rebates on 1991 Volvos, which were to expire Dec. 31, were extended until March 31.

Audi is paying $1,000 to $1,500 to dealers who purchase specified 1991 cars from its port stock. The payment is $1,500 on the 100 series and 200 series and $1,000 on the 90 series.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Inc., which paid the luxury tax on 1991 Rolls-Royces and Bentleys purchased by its customers, discontinued the program Dec. 31. "It is unlikely" that the luxury car company will reinstitute the program in the near future, a spokesman said.

Incentive programs for several other importers expired last week and had not been renewed last Friday.

The companies are: Alfa Romeo Distributors of North America; American Honda Motor Co. Inc. (Honda and Acura divisions); American Isuzu Motors Inc.; Mazda Motor of America Inc.; Mitsubishi Motor Sales of America Inc.; Nissan Motor Corp. in U.S.A. (Nissan Division); Subaru of America Inc.; and Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. Inc. (Toyota Division).

INCENTIVE WATCH— DEALER INCENTIVES

NEW PROGRAMS

AUDI (1991 models, no expiration date)

Audi 100 and 200	$1,500
Audi 90	$1,000

Rebates apply to models purchased by dealer from Audi of America port stocks.

VOLVO (expires March 31)

1992 models	
240 series	$500-1,000
740 series	$1,000-1,500
940 series	$1,500
1991 models	
240 series	$1,500
740 series	$1,750-2,500
940 series	$1,500-2,500
780 coupe	$2,500

CONTINUING PROGRAMS

BMW (no expiration date)

750iL (1991)	$10,000

GENERAL MOTORS

Chevrolet (expires Feb. 4)	
Caprice (1992)	$250-800, quota
Camaro (1992)	$300-750, quota
Corvette ZR-1 (1992)	$2,000
Other Corvette (1992)	$1,000
Corvette ZR-1 (1991)	$3,000
Other Corvette (1991)	$2,000
Cadillac Allante (1991) (no expiration date)	$7,500 on first sale, $8,500 on additional sales
Pontiac Sunbird	$300

LOTUS (1991, no expiration date)

Elan	$5,000
Esprit Turbo	$11,000-15,000

NISSAN (expires Feb. 2)

300ZX (1991)	$2,500-$3,500, quota

PEUGEOT (no expiration date)

405	$5,000
505	$6,000

SUZUKI (expires Feb. 3)

Swift (1992)	$400-700
Swift (1991)	$700-1,000
Sidekick (1992)	$200-700
Sidekick (1991)	$700-1,000

VOLKSWAGEN (no expiration date)

Passat (1991)	$1,500
Jetta, Fox, Golf (1991)	$500
All 1990 cars	$500-1,500

INCENTIVE WATCH — CUSTOMER INCENTIVES

CONTINUING PROGRAMS

CHRYSLER CORP.

Expires Jan. 31. Finance rates in lieu of rebates run from 0 to 9.9 percent on Sundance, Shadow, Acclaim, Spirit, LeBaron sedan and Cherokee, and from 4.9 to 9.9 percent on other models.

1990-92 models

NATIONAL REBATES	
Chrysler Imperial	$2,000
Dodge Monaco	$1,500
Shadow	$1,000
Colt 3-door	$500
Dodge Ramcharger	$2,000
Eagle Premier	$1,500
Talon	$1,000
Summit 3-door	$500
Jeep Comanche	$750
Wrangler	$500
Plymouth Laser, Sundance	$1,000
Colt 3-door	$500
REGIONAL REBATES: Northeast	
Chrysler LeBaron sedan	$1,500
Dodge Spirit	$1,500
Dodge Dakota	$1,000
Jeep Cherokee	$1,500
Plymouth Acclaim	$1,500
All Chrysler Corp. minivans	$1,000
REGIONAL REBATES: Central, West	
Chrysler New Yorker Fifth Avenue	$1,500
New Yorker Salon, LeBaron sedan	$1,000
Dodge Dynasty, Spirit	$1,000
Dodge Ram gas pickup (Central only)	$1,500
Ram wagon	$1,000
Dakota	$750
Dodge Ram gas pickup (West only)	$750
Ram 50 pickup	$500
Jeep Cherokee	$1,500
Plymouth Acclaim	$1,000
All Chrysler Corp. minivans	$500

FORD MOTOR CO.

1992 models

Expires Feb. 4. In lieu of rebates, finance rates of 2.9 to 7.9 percent are offered. Finance rates differ by vehicle lines and regions. No finance rate incentives on Lincoln models.

Ford Festiva, Tempo, Taurus	$500
Escort GT and LX-E, Mustang, Thunderbird	$750
Probe, Taurus SHO, Crown Victoria	$1,000
F series, Aerostar	$500
Ranger	$750
Aerostar (Northeast), Bronco, Econoline (RV pkg.)	$1,000
Mercury Topaz, Sable	$500
Capri, Tracer LTS, Cougar	$750
Grand Marquis	$1,000
Lincoln Town Car, Mark VII, Continental	$1,000

Pre-1992 models

1990-91 Ford Division models and 1991 Lincoln-Mercury models. Expires Feb. 4. In lieu of rebates, finance rates of 2.9 to 7.9 percent are offered. Finance rates differ by vehicle line and region.

Ford Tempo, Taurus	$400
Taurus SHO	$600
Escort, Mustang, Thunderbird	$750
Festiva, Probe	$1,000
Ranger, F series, Aerostar, Econoline (except E-150 RV)	$400
Aerostar (Northeast), Bronco, Econoline E-150 (RV pkg.)	$1,000
Mercury Topaz, Sable	$400
Tracer, Cougar	$750
Capri	$2,000

GENERAL MOTORS

Expires Feb. 4. Finance rates in lieu of rebates start at 2.9 percent for Buick, Oldsmobile and Pontiac; 6.9 percent for Chevrolet and GMC.

1992 models

Buick Skylark*	$250-750*
Century, Regal*	$250-1,000*
Riviera	$2,000
Chevrolet Caprice	$1,000
Geo Metro and Storm	$750
Geo Prizm, Camaro, Beretta, Lumina	$500
Cavalier	$500
G van, S/T Blazer, Lumina APV	$1,000
Geo Tracker, Astro, S/T pickup	$750
C/K pickup	$500
GMC G-van, S15 Jimmy (except Typhoon)	$1,000
Sonoma (except Syclone, GT), Safari	$750
Sierra (except Crew Cab)	$500
Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera (national)	$1,000
Regional programs, various models	$500-2,000
Pontiac Trans Sport	$1,000
Grand Prix	$750
LeMans, Firebird	$500

*Based on option package selected.

1991 models

Chevrolet Caprice	$1,000
Geo Metro, Camaro	$750
Geo Storm and Prizm, Beretta, Lumina	$500
Cavalier, Corsica	$300
V Blazer, Suburban, G-van, S/T Blazer, Lumina APV	$1,000
Geo Tracker, Astro, S/T pickup, R/V and C/K pickups	$500
GMC V Jimmy, Suburban	$1,500
S15 Jimmy, G-van, Safari	$1,000
Sonoma (except Syclone)	$750
Sierra, R/V pickups	$500
Oldsmobile - regional programs, various models	$500-2,000
Pontiac Trans Sport, LeMans, Firebird	$1,000
Grand Prix	$750

HYUNDAI

49 states (expires Jan. 6)	
Excel (1992)	$500
Excel (1991)	$1,000
Scoupe (1992)	$500
Scoupe (1991)	$750-1,000
Sonata (1991)	$500-1,500
California only (1991 models, expires April 2)	
Excel, Scoupe	$750-1,000
Sonata	$1,000-1,500
All states (1991 models, expires Jan. 6)	
All 1991 models if trade is a 1986-90 Hyundai	$1,000

This week's production story appears on Page 2

SCHEDULED PLANT CLOSINGS

Plant	Weeks down	Units lost/ week
CHRYSLER		
Belvidere, Ill.	1/6	
Chrysler Fifth Avenue		1,300
Chrysler Imperial		240
Chrysler New Yorker Salon		800
Dodge Dynasty		1,800
Bramalea, Ontario		†
Sterling Heights, Mich.	1/6, 1/13	
Dodge Shadow		1,900
Plymouth Sundance		1,700
Toledo, Ohio	1/6	
Jeep Cherokee		4,200
Jeep Comanche		135
Warren, Mich.	1/6	
Dodge full-sized pickups		2,500
Dodge mid-sized pickups		1,400
FORD MOTOR CO.		
Dearborn, Mich.	1/6	3,700
Ford Mustang		
Edison, N.J.	1/6	4,900
Ford Ranger		
Kansas City, Mo.	1/6	4,400
Ford Tempo		
Mercury Topaz		
Kentucky Truck (Louisville)	1/6	1,300
Ford heavy trucks		
Lorain, Ohio	1/6, 1/13*	4,300
Ford Thunderbird		
Mercury Cougar		
Lorain, Ohio	1/6	4,400
Ford Econoline/Club Wagon		
Michigan Truck (Wayne)	1/6	3,800
Ford Bronco		
Ford F series		
Norfolk, Va.	1/6	3,200
Ford F series		
Oakville, Ontario	1/6	4,800
Ford Tempo		
Mercury Topaz		
Ontario Truck (Oakville)	1/6	2,795
Ford F series		
St. Louis	1/6	4,000
Ford Aerostar		
St. Paul, Minn.	1/6	3,400
Ford F series		
Ford Ranger		
St. Thomas, Ontario	1/6	4,800
Ford Crown Victoria		
Mercury Grand Marquis		
Wayne, Mich.	1/6	5,800
Ford Escort		
Wixom, Mich.	1/6**	4,100
Lincoln Continental		
Lincoln Mark VII		
Lincoln Town Car		
GENERAL MOTORS		
Detroit	1/6	
Chevrolet P-model		475
GMC P-model		30
Fort Wayne, Ind.	1/6, 1/13	
Chevrolet C/K pickup		3,400
GMC Sierra		1,175
Lake Orion, Mich.	1/6, 1/13, 1/20	
Cadillac DeVille		3,900
Olds. Ninety Eight		1,200
Oshawa, Ontario (No. 1)	1/6	6,000
Chevrolet Lumina		
Oshawa, Ontario (No. 2)	1/6	4,000
Buick Regal		
Chevrolet Lumina		
Pontiac, Mich. (East)	1/6, 1/13, 1/20	*
Chevrolet C/K pickup		
GMC Sierra		
Pontiac, Mich. (West)	1/6	
Chevrolet S10 pickup		2,285
Chevrolet S10 Blazer		3,550
GMC Sonoma		1,000
GMC S15 Jimmy		1,220
Shreveport, La.	1/6	
Chevrolet S10 pickup		5,100
GMC Sonoma/Syclone		1,100
Chevrolet S10 Blazer		3,100
GMC Yukon		50
Wentzville, Mo.	1/6	5,500
Buick Park Avenue		
Olds. Eighty Eight		
Pontiac Bonneville		
Total U.S. car		**40,640**
Total Canada car		**19,600**
Total U.S. truck		**54,920**
Total Canada truck		**2,795**
Total units lost week of 1/6		**117,955**

†Plant closed for retooling until spring 1992.
*Plant idled due to maintenance.
**Plant idled due to materials shortage.
Source: Automotive News Data Center

Among the cars that will be unveiled at the Motor City's auto show is the 1993 Chrysler New Yorker, which goes into production in February 1993.

Detroit show's hot models

Called the Geo Concept, this four-door sedan really is a look at the 1994 Prizm.

JOE WILSSENS/AUTOMOTIVE NEWS

Workers in Detroit's Cobo Center put the finishing touches on the display for Nissan's 1993 minivan, called the Quest.

The Corvette Sting Ray III concept features dramatically angled headlamps and a longer wheelbase.

Chevrolet unveils next Geo Prizm

RICK KRANZ
Staff Reporter

DETROIT — Chevrolet will unveil two concept vehicles at the Detroit auto show that indicate the styling direction of the next generation Geo Prizm and what might be in store for Corvette buffs.

Called Geo Concept, this aerodymanic four-door sedan owes its heritage to the redesigned 1993 Toyota Corolla, which goes on sale this fall in the United States. The redesigned Prizm will bow later as a 1994 model.

The Geo Concept has all-new sheet metal and aerodynamic refinements that integrate the doors into the roof headers. The hood line is steeply sloped.

Chevrolet says the concept vehicle uses many one-piece body panels in order to improve fit and finish.

Safety highlights include a driver-side air bag and anti-lock brakes. Power comes from a 1.6-liter multi-port fuel-injected four-cylinder engine.

The Corvette Sting Ray III concept car features dramatically angled headlights and pedals that move with a memory for preset positions.

The car was created at General Motors' Advanced Concept Center in California.

The Sting Ray III's wheelbase is 103 inches, nearly seven inches longer that the production Corvette, while the overall length is two inches shorter.

A coil-over-shock front suspension design replaces the transverse leaf springs. The gearbox is positioned between the rear wheels for better weight distribution. AN

LA

This year's car show is heavy on functional

continued from PAGE 1

On the more functional side, Nissan and Ford showed their 1993 jointly developed minivans, the Nissan Quest and Mercury Villager.

Isuzu introduced its new flagship, an all-new Trooper sport-utility. Saturn displayed its third model, a 1993 wagon. (See story on Page 4.) And Infiniti showed its J30, a new six-cylinder sedan that will compete in the low $30,000 range.

There were also some new offerings in the highly competitive sports coupe segments. The third-generation Mazda RX-7 and convertible versions of Nissan's 240SX and 300ZX were shown. And Ford displayed its 1993 model-year replacement for the Probe.

Appropriately for smog-plagued Los Angeles — and the times — almost every executive's presentation mentioned efforts in the areas of alternative-fuel vehicles, electric vehicles, fuel economy and recyclability. BMW chose Los Angeles for the world debut of its E2, an electric car prototype designed for America.

Chrysler said it plans to offer 2,100 Dodge Spirit/Plymouth Acclaim models that will run on either gasoline or M85. The program will begin this year with government fleets in Washington and California, and expand in July to include individual buyers.

WAITING FOR LH

Conspicuous by its absence — if only temporarily — was Chrysler's hope for the future — its 1993 LH sedans. But they will arrive at the Los Angeles show on Wednesday, when they will be introduced simultaneously at Detroit's auto show. Chrysler did use Los Angeles for the first public showing of a 1992 entry, the 8.0-liter, V-10 Dodge Viper.

"I'm optimistic about what we're doing" in 1992, said Francois Castaing, Chrysler's vice president of vehicle engineering. "But there are still many things out of our control. We can get the Viper out on time, the LHs out on time, but we can't control public policy, the economy or consumer confidence.

He added: "Lower interest rates, if they are passed along to consumers, might help. But a middle-class tax cut, and even the interest rate cut won't help what's making people cautious today — a fear that they're going to lose their jobs."

Other show highlights:

■ Ferrari chose one of its best markets to unveil the Testarossa replacement, the 512tr. The 5.9-liter, 12-cylinder car will cost an estimated $190,000. It went on sale last week.

■ Audi's Quattro Spyder concept car, which stole the Frankfurt show in canary yellow guise last fall, was painted green for its Los Angeles showing. Audi says it chose green to help emphasize that the car is both fun to drive and easy on the environment because of its light weight, among other things. Although speculation is rife that Audi is going to put the car into production and sell it in the United States, a spokesman said that decision hasn't been made.

■ Cadillac introduced the 1993 Allante with the new 32-valve, 290-horsepower, Northstar V-8 engine. It's the first Cadillac to go from 0 to 60 mph in less than seven seconds.

■ BMW of North America Inc. executives suggested that the company plans to bring a version of the E2 electric car to California before 1993, when it would be expected to offer a zero-emissions vehicle to meet California's clean air rules. Los Angeles also marked the world debut of BMW's 318i sedan.

FEW NEW CONCEPTS

The show's concept cars were mostly repeats from previous shows, such as the Ford Contour, Chrysler 300 and Mercedes-Benz C112.

Subaru of America spotlighted its Amadeus, a 250-hp, four-wheel-steering sport wagon based on the SVX platform. Chris Wackman, Subaru's vice president of marketing, said parent Fuji Heavy Industries had mated the SVX to a "most-traditional" Subaru vehicle: the all-wheel-drive station wagon.

Like most executives, Wackman expressed more bullishness over his company's prospects than the market in general.

He termed the recent drop in interest rates a double-edged sword. While they might trickle-down to help consumers looking for auto financing, "they might also be keeping people out of the market," he said. "If you're in the midst of refinancing your home, you're not going to want a lot of new credit — like a car — on your records." AN